

Narcissists in Positions of Authority

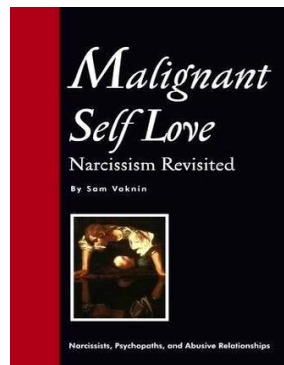
Frequently Asked Questions # 11

Narcissistic [bosses](#), [leaders](#), [gurus](#), teachers, doctors, [therapists](#), judges, or [law enforcement officers](#) tend to [abuse](#) the authority vested in them.

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"He knows not how to rule a kingdom, that cannot manage a province; nor can he wield a province, that cannot order a city; nor he order a city, that knows not how to regulate a village; nor he a village, that cannot guide a family; nor can that man govern well a family that knows not how to govern himself; neither can any govern himself unless his reason be

lord, will and appetite her vassals; nor can reason rule unless herself be ruled by God, and be obedient to Him."

Hugo Grotius

Question:

Are narcissists in position of authority more likely to take advantage of their patients/students/subordinates?

Answer:

Being in a position of authority secures the uninterrupted flow of Narcissistic Supply. Fed by the awe, fear, subordination, admiration, adoration and obedience of his underlings, parish, students, or patients – the narcissist thrives in such circumstances. The narcissist aspires to acquire authority by any means available to him. He may achieve this by making use of some outstanding traits or skills such as his intelligence, or through an asymmetry built into a relationship. The narcissistic medical doctor or mental health professional and his patients, the narcissistic guide, teacher, or mentor and his students, the narcissistic leader, guru, pundit, or psychic and his followers or admirers, or the narcissistic business tycoon, boss, or employer and his subordinates – all are instances of such asymmetries. The rich, powerful, more knowledgeable narcissist occupy a [Pathological Narcissistic Space](#).

These types of relationships – based on the unidirectional and unilateral flow of Narcissistic Supply – border on abuse. The narcissist, in pursuit of an ever-increasing supply, of an ever-larger dose of adoration, and an ever-bigger fix of attention – gradually loses his moral constraints. With time, it gets harder to obtain Narcissistic Supply. The sources of such supply are human and they become weary, rebellious, tired, bored, disgusted, repelled, or plainly amused by the narcissist's incessant dependence, his childish craving for attention, his exaggerated or even paranoid fears which lead to obsessive-compulsive behaviours. To secure their continued collaboration in the procurement of his much-needed supply – the narcissist might resort to emotional extortion, straight blackmail, abuse, or misuse of his authority.

The temptation to do so, though, is universal. No doctor is immune to the charms of certain female patients, nor are university professors asexual. What prevent them from immorally, cynically, callously and consistently abusing their position are ethical imperatives embedded in them through socialisation and empathy. They learned the difference between right and wrong and, having internalised it, they choose right when they face a moral dilemma. They empathise with other human beings, "putting themselves in their shoes", and refrain from doing unto others what they do not wish to be done to them.

It is in these two crucial points that narcissists differ from other humans.

Their socialisation process – usually the product of problematic early relationships with Primary Objects (parents, or caregivers) – is often perturbed and results in social dysfunctioning. And they are incapable of empathising: humans are there only to supply them with Narcissistic Supply. Those unfortunate humans who do not comply with this overriding dictum must be made to alter their ways and if even this fails, the narcissist loses interest in them and they are classified as "sub-human, animals, service-providers, functions, symbols" and worse. Hence the abrupt shifts from over-valuation to devaluation of others. While bearing the gifts of Narcissistic Supply – the "other" is idealised by the narcissist. The narcissist shifts to the opposite pole (devaluation) when Narcissistic Supply dries up or when he estimates that it is about to.

As far as the narcissist is concerned, there is no moral dimension to abusing others – only a pragmatic one: will he be punished for doing so? The narcissist is atavistically responsive to fear and lacks any in-depth understanding of what it is to be a human being. Trapped in his pathology, the narcissist resembles an alien on drugs, a junkie of Narcissistic Supply devoid of the kind of language, which renders human emotions intelligible.

Narcissistic Leaders

The narcissistic leader is the culmination and reification of his period, culture, and civilization. He is likely to rise to prominence in narcissistic societies.

The malignant narcissist invents and then projects a false, fictitious, self for the world to fear, or to admire. He maintains a tenuous grasp on reality to start with and this is further exacerbated by the trappings of power. The narcissist's grandiose self-delusions and fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience are supported by real life authority and the narcissist's predilection to surround himself with obsequious sycophants.

(continued below)

This article appears in my book, "Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"

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The narcissist's personality is so precariously balanced that he cannot tolerate even a hint of criticism and disagreement. Most narcissists are paranoid and suffer from ideas of reference (the delusion that they are being mocked or discussed when they are not). Thus, narcissists often regard themselves as "victims of persecution".

The narcissistic leader fosters and encourages a personality cult with all the hallmarks of an institutional religion: priesthood, rites, rituals, temples, worship, catechism, mythology. The leader is this religion's ascetic saint. He monastically denies himself earthly pleasures (or so he claims) in order to be able to dedicate himself fully to his calling.

The narcissistic leader is a monstrously inverted Jesus, sacrificing his life and denying himself so that his people - or humanity at large - should benefit. By surpassing and suppressing his humanity, the narcissistic leader became a distorted version of Nietzsche's "superman".

But being a-human or super-human also means being a-sexual and a-moral.

In this restricted sense, narcissistic leaders are post-modernist and moral relativists. They project to the masses an androgynous figure and enhance it by engendering the adoration of nudity and all things "natural" - or by strongly repressing these feelings. But what they refer to as "nature" is not natural at all.

The narcissistic leader invariably proffers an aesthetic of decadence and evil carefully orchestrated and artificial - though it is not perceived this way by him or by his followers. Narcissistic leadership is about reproduced copies, not about originals. It is about the manipulation of symbols - not about veritable atavism or true conservatism.

In short: narcissistic leadership is about theatre, not about life. To enjoy the spectacle (and be subsumed by it), the leader demands the suspension of judgment, depersonalization, and de-realization. Catharsis is tantamount, in this narcissistic dramaturgy, to self-annulment.

Narcissism is nihilistic not only operationally, or ideologically. Its very language and narratives are nihilistic. Narcissism is conspicuous nihilism - and the cult's leader serves as a role model, annihilating the Man, only to re-appear as a pre-ordained and irresistible force of nature.

Narcissistic leadership often poses as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the

superpowers, the corrupt order. Narcissistic movements are puerile, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state, or group, or upon the leader.

Minorities or "others" - often arbitrarily selected - constitute a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that is "wrong". They are accused of being old, they are eerily disembodied, they are cosmopolitan, they are part of the establishment, they are "decadent", they are hated on religious and socio-economic grounds, or because of their race, sexual orientation, origin ... They are different, they are narcissistic (feel and act as morally superior), they are everywhere, they are defenceless, they are credulous, they are adaptable (and thus can be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They are the perfect hate figure. Narcissists thrive on hatred and pathological envy.

This is precisely the source of the fascination with Hitler, diagnosed by Erich Fromm - together with Stalin - as a malignant narcissist. He was an inverted human. His unconscious was his conscious. He acted out our most repressed drives, fantasies, and wishes. He provides us with a glimpse of the horrors that lie beneath the veneer, the barbarians at our personal gates, and what it was like before we invented civilization. Hitler forced us all through a time warp and many did not emerge. He was not the devil. He was one of us. He was what Arendt aptly called the banality of evil. Just an ordinary, mentally disturbed, failure, a member of a mentally disturbed and failing nation, who lived through disturbed and failing times. He was the perfect mirror, a channel, a voice, and the very depth of our souls.

The narcissistic leader prefers the sparkle and glamour of well-orchestrated illusions to the tedium and method of real accomplishments. His reign is all smoke and mirrors, devoid of substances, consisting of mere appearances and mass delusions. In the aftermath of his regime - the narcissistic leader having died, been deposed, or voted out of office - it all unravels. The tireless and constant prestidigitation ceases and the entire edifice crumbles. What looked like an economic miracle turns out to have been a fraud-laced bubble. Loosely-held empires disintegrate. Laboriously assembled business conglomerates go to pieces. "Earth shattering" and "revolutionary" scientific discoveries and theories are discredited. Social experiments end in mayhem.

It is important to understand that the use of violence must be ego-syntonic. It must accord with the self-image of the narcissist. It must abet and sustain his grandiose fantasies and feed his sense of entitlement. It must conform with the narcissistic narrative.

Thus, a narcissist who regards himself as the benefactor of the poor, a member of the common folk, the representative of the disenfranchised, the champion of the dispossessed against the corrupt elite - is highly unlikely to use violence at first.

The pacific mask crumbles when the narcissist has become convinced that the very people he purported to speak for, his constituency, his grassroots fans, the prime sources of his narcissistic supply - have turned against him. At first, in a desperate effort to maintain the fiction underlying his chaotic personality, the narcissist strives to explain away the sudden reversal of sentiment. "The people are being duped by (the media, big industry, the military, the elite, etc.)", "they don't really know what they are doing", "following a rude awakening, they will revert to form", etc.

When these flimsy attempts to patch a tattered personal mythology fail - the narcissist is injured. Narcissistic injury inevitably leads to narcissistic rage and to a terrifying display of unbridled aggression. The pent-up frustration and hurt translate into devaluation. That which was previously idealized - is now discarded with contempt and hatred.

This primitive defense mechanism is called "splitting". To the narcissist, things and people are either entirely bad (evil) or entirely good. He projects onto others his own shortcomings and negative emotions, thus becoming a totally good object. A narcissistic leader is likely to justify the butchering of his own people by claiming that they intended to kill him, undo the revolution, devastate the economy, or the country, etc.

The "small people", the "rank and file", the "loyal soldiers" of the narcissist - his flock, his nation, his employees - they pay the price. The disillusionment and disenchantment are agonizing. The process of reconstruction, of rising from the ashes, of overcoming the trauma of having been deceived, exploited and manipulated - is drawn-out. It is difficult to trust again, to have faith, to love, to be led, to collaborate. Feelings of shame and guilt engulf the erstwhile followers of the narcissist. This is his sole legacy: a massive post-traumatic stress disorder.

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